



FEMA

October 23, 2008

The Honorable Chester J. Culver
Governor of Iowa
State Capitol
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Governor Culver:

I am responding to your letter (co-signed by Lt Governor Judge), dated October 21, 2008, addressing concerns with formaldehyde in FEMA-provided mobile homes. I share your concern for the health and safety of Iowans living in FEMA provided mobile homes. We will work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to use the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) certified analytical method and CDC-developed protocol to offer retesting and will coordinate with your office on timing.

In fact, I share this same concern with many other Governors who are likewise responsible for the safety and welfare of the many thousands of disaster victims who reside in temporary housing across our nation. It is from the breadth of this concern that FEMA worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish the most rigorous and accurate formaldehyde testing and measurement protocol heretofore devised to ensure the health and welfare of disaster victims. This protocol relies upon a nationally recognized testing procedure, certified by NIOSH, which guides measurement over a period of seven days and properly accounts for environmental conditions. Recently, members of your staff were able to visit one of our testing facilities in Cumberland, Maryland, to observe our strict adherence to the elements of this testing process. This protocol has been approved by CDC, and was the basis upon which FEMA provided the State of Iowa with units that tested at or below the formaldehyde threshold (0.04 ppm), a threshold established as acceptable for occupation by the State of Iowa.

FEMA's concern for the health and safety of occupant families has extended beyond the point at which we provided mobile homes that met the standards established by the State of Iowa. Recognizing that formaldehyde exists in every living environment, our continual focus - one actively shared by you and your staff - has been to inform and assist occupant families as they strive to achieve safe living accommodation by managing the broad range of health and safety risks. By sharing information in printed form, through discussions with families, and maintaining an active formaldehyde advisory hotline and web site, we advise occupant families of the manner in which formaldehyde is introduced into the home and how it can be controlled. Typically, these levels rise and fall throughout the day, depending on the character of inside activity and outside ambient air levels. Accordingly, it should not be considered unusual that formaldehyde levels will fluctuate in these (or any) living environments during the day and on a day-to-day basis. Any testing we do may only show that, although the baseline level of formaldehyde in the mobile home or park model provided was below .04 ppm, normal family lifestyles and ambient air have a significant impact on formaldehyde levels.

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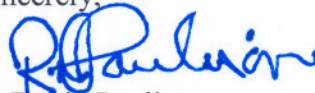
We will continue to communicate these issues to occupant families and to explore and make available all reasonable forms of assistance to support them as they work daily to manage a safe living environment. Toward this purpose, FEMA is aggressively reaching out to all Iowa mobile home occupants to reiterate the important information about formaldehyde that was provided when they first occupied the unit, and the steps that can be taken to mitigate or minimize the occurrence of formaldehyde. I have dispatched yesterday and today additional members of my staff, a certified hygienist from the Office of Health Affairs, Department of Homeland Security, and a representative from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to expand these efforts.

To the extent that any family has concerns for their health and safety, we will work with them to identify an alternate form of housing and assist them in the conduct of relocation.

Throughout the response and recovery to the floods that devastated larger areas of Iowa, we have worked together as partners to meet a number of expected and unexpected challenges. The issues associated with formaldehyde should be no different. The best solutions will be those that come from joint discussion and teamwork centered on common objectives. In this case, the common objective is the health and safety of occupant families.

I look forward to working with you to address our shared role in protecting the health and safety of Iowans.

Sincerely,



R. David Paulison
Administrator

cc: Lt Governor Patty Judge
Richard Hainje, Regional Administrator, FEMA Region VII
William Vogel, Federal Coordinating Officer, FEMA DR-1763-IA